Chapter I

Purpose and Need for Action

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A Why an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

There are many reasons why the future management of the Malheur National Forest may be of interest to you Perhaps you live in a community nearby, you may even work in the Forest daily Perhaps you travel for a day or more to hunt, fish, or hike here You may never have visited this National Forest, but are vitally interested in the future management of the unroaded areas located here. You may represent a company interested in the minerals beneath the earth's surface

These may be just some of the possible reasons why you are reading this document These and other activities will all be affected in some way by the decisions made about management of the Forest's resources This document is an important part of making those decisions. Since much of the information is technical, it will not always be easy or entertaining reading

This Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) describes the proposed course of action (the preferred alternative) and alternative courses of action for managing the land and resources of the Malheur National Forest It also describes the environment affected and the anticipated environmental effects of implementing each of these alternatives.

Each of these alternatives reflects a different way of addressing local, regional, and national issues They provide for different combinations of uses, goods, and services from the Malheur National Forest Each alternative was evaluated to determine its potential to provide long-term, sustained yields of these goods and services in an environmentally sound manner The design and analysis of the alternatives are displayed in this document.

The preferred alternative is the alternative which, in the opinion of the Forest Service, provides the level and mixture of uses, goods, and services which best resolves the issues while maximizing net public benefits (Net public benefits are discussed on the next page) The preferred alternative identified in this Final Environmental Impact Statement is the basis for the accompanying Malheur National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan)

B Legal Basis

The preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement, disclosing a preferred alternative and alternatives to it, is required by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) (36 CFR 219) including the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and the Council on Environmental Quality NEPA Regulations (40 CFR 1500) For purposes of NEPA disclosure, the Environmental Impact Statement and Forest Plan are treated as combined documents

The Environmental Impact Statement is required because the Forest Plan is a major Federal action with a significant effect on the quality of the human environment Its purpose is to describe effects on the environment in enough detail to aid in the selection of management direction for the Forest Equally important, its purpose is to make this same information available to the public, and to encourage public participation in the development and refinement of that information

C The Forest Plan

The Forest Plan presents (1) a summary of the management situation, (2) a summary of the issues and concerns, (3) resource outputs, (4) standards, (5) management area goals and objectives, and (6) monitoring and evaluation requirements for the preferred alternative This information will guide all natural resource management activities on the Malheur National Forest

The purpose of the Forest Plan is to provide management direction for multiple use and the sustained yield of goods and services from National Forest System lands. The overall goal is to provide the greatest long-term net public benefits while responding effectively to public issues

Net public benefits are the overall long-term value to the nation of all outputs and positive effects (benefits) less all associated inputs and negative effects (costs). Net public benefits measure both quantity and quality Whether the Forest Plan provides for greater net public benefits than do other alternatives is, ultimately, a matter of judgment

D. Relationship to Resources Planning Act

The Forest planning process occurs within the overall framework of both national and regional planning As required by the laws cited above and related planning regulations, the Forest Service has a three-level planning process.

- National Level Resources Planning Act (RPA) Assessment and Program
- Regional Level Regional Guide
- Forest Level Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan)

This three-level process involves a continuous flow of information and management direction among the three Forest Service administrative levels. Information from Forest planning flows to the national level for use in planning and assessment as required by the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA). In turn, the Resources Planning Act program information flows back to the Forest level. In this structure, regional planning conveys information between the Forest and national levels.

The Resources Planning Act (RPA) Program establishes long-range resource objectives based on an assessment of resource demand and supply over a 50-year planning period. The program objectives are submitted to Congress to help them determine appropriation and authorization of the Forest Service annual budget Since allocations in the annual budget have a major effect on forest management activities, many of the Forest's actual outputs and environmental effects are ultimately determined in large part by the annual budget.

The 1980 National Resources Planning Act Assessment set output goals for various resources which were then divided into Regional goals Within each Forest Service region, these goals were further divided into forest goals The "Regional Guide for the Pacific Northwest Region," May 1984, amended December 1988, is the source of the Malheur National Forest's goals and some of the management standards contained in the Forest Plan

These Resources Planning Act objectives represent the benefits that are sought by society at the national level The assignment of these objectives in the Regional Guide is not binding on individual forests, but at least one alternative considered must respond to the RPA objectives. Regional standards incorporated into forest planning assure response to concerns at the regional level

The Resources Planning Act Program objectives (and often the Regional Guide) are updated every 5 years The Forest Plan is reviewed every 5 years and is ordinarily revised on a 10-year cycle or when changes in the Resources Planning Act program significantly affect forest programs. The Forest Plan will be revised at least every 15 years. It also may be revised when conditions or demands in the area covered by the Forest Plan change significantly. This process ensures that the Forest Plan is responsive to changing conditions

E Forest Planning Process

The Forest planning process is based on land and resource capabilities and determines the Forest's ability to respond to the national demands identified in the Resources Planning Act assessment and to public issues This determination is based on evaluation of a wide range of alternatives representing outputs both above and below the 1980 RPA Program. These alternatives were developed and evaluated in compliance with the National Forest Management Act, and forest planning process The steps in this process are listed below

1. Identification of issues, concerns, and opportunities,
2 Development of planning criteria,
3 Inventory data and information collection,
4 Analysis of the management situation,
5 Formulation of alternatives,
6 Estimated effects of alternatives,
7 Evaluation of alternatives,
8. Selection of an alternative,
9 Implementation, and
10 Monitoring and evaluation

The result of these planning steps is the environmental analysis described in this Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) These criteria used to guide the process are part of the planning records All documents and files that chronicle the Forest planning process of the Malheur National Forest are available for review at the Supervisor's Office, 139 NE Dayton Street, John Day, Oregon 97845 These documents and files, or "planning records," contain the detailed information and decisions used in developing this FEIS and the Forest Plan The planning records are referenced at appropriate points in the text and appendices of this FEIS and the Forest Plan

This FEIS and the Forest Plan have been developed following the issuance of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Forest Plan and an involved public participation process These documents have been developed in response to public comments received during the public review period A detailed account of the comments received and the activities held can be found in Chapter V, of this document

F What Happens Now?

As a result of the planning process outlined above, the Forest Supervisor has recommended a preferred alternative (Alternative I). The preferred alternative is identified in this FEIS and displayed as the Forest Plan This recommendation has been made to the Regional Forester The accompanying Record of Decision (ROD) is a statement of the Regional Forester's decision and the rationale behind it

The final step in the planning process is the actual implementation of the Forest Plan. Implementation requires moving from an existing management program, with a budget, and "targets" for accomplishment, to a new management program with a budget, goals, and objectives that provide a different way of addressing the issues The Forest Plan establishes the direction for the Malheur National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years, in conjunction with Forest Service Manuals and Handbooks and the Pacific Northwest Regional Guide

G Relationship to Other Plans

This Forest Plan supersedes all present land management plans for the Malheur National Forest Land management plans superseded are for the following planning units John Day, Silvies-Malheur, and South Fork Also superseded is the 1979 Timber Resource Management Plan for the Malheur National Forest

Direction in the following documents is incorporated into and becomes a part of this Forest Plan Canyon Creek Research Natural Area Establishment Report and Forest Transportation Development Plan

Several documents designed to give further guidance to management activities have been or will be developed under the direction of this Forest Plan See Chapter V of the Forest Plan for a comprehensive list of documents to be developed or revised.

All subsequent activities affecting the Forest, including budget proposals, must be based on the Forest Plan In addition, (subject to valid existing rights) all permits, contracts, cooperative agreements, and other instruments for the use and occupancy of these National Forest System lands must be consistent with the Forest Plan

This Final EIS will be used as a tiered environmental impact statement This means that the environmental analyses and documents prepared for future projects will refer to this EIS, Forest Plan, and associated documents rather than repeating information Environmental analyses for specific projects will therefore concentrate on issues unique to those projects

H What If I need Help With All This?

A glossary defining terms, units, abbreviations, and a list of references cited is provided after Chapter V. You may find it useful to consult the alternative maps when reviewing this FEIS The Forest Plan provides additional detail about how the proposed alternative would be carried out on the ground

I. The Malheur National Forest

The Forest is 1 of 19 National Forests that make up the Pacific Northwest Region, Region 6, of the National Forest System This Region includes the states of Oregon and Washington and has its headquarters in Portland, Oregon.

The Forest's 1,459,422 acres are located in eastern Oregon, approximately equidistant from the borders of Washington, Idaho, and Nevada The Strawberry Mountain Range, part of the Blue Mountains, extends east to west through the center of the Forest The elevation of the Forest varies from approximately 4,000 feet near the southwest boundary to 9,038 feet on Strawberry Mountain The result is a diverse landscape of grasslands, sage, and juniper, forests of pine, fir, and other tree species; and subalpine lakes and meadows

The northern part of the Forest is drained by the John Day River System into the Columbia River Basin These rivers and their tributaries support populations of ocean-going salmon and steelhead as well as resident trout. The southern part of the Forest is drained by the Silvies River System into the Great Basin and by the Malheur River System into the Snake River These drainages support populations of resident trout.

These lands are in Grant, Harney, Baker, and Malheur counties The Forest is within a day's drive from Portland, Oregon Principal access routes are U.S. 26 and U S 395, winding, two-lane, rural routes There are two main population centers the John Day Valley from Dayville to Prairie City, and a 5-mile radius around Burns The total population is about 15,000

From the time of the first settlements, the Forest has played an important role in the development of local communities This role continues today. The Forest lands are managed to provide a sustained yield of lumber and wood products Local ranchers graze about 25,000 cows with their calves on the meadows and forested range Mineral deposits exist beneath the surface of land used for other activities. These same lands provide year-round recreational opportunities Big game hunting is the largest recreational use of the Forest, attracting many hunters to the area each year.

The Malheur National Forest consists of complex natural systems that can be managed for different mixes of resource outputs, land uses, and environmental conditions A more complete description of the Forest and its natural resources can be found in Chapter III, Affected Environment.

J. Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities (ICOs)

Different people and groups prefer to see the Forest managed to emphasize different outputs, uses, and conditions Because all the resources, uses, and conditions of a forest are interconnected, management decisions to emphasize some resources result in changes in others There are practical and natural limits to what the Forest can provide

These different preferences of individuals and groups and the physical, biological, and legal limits of forest management are identified in the issues which guided the Forest planning process. A public issue is a subject or question of widespread public interest relating to management of the National Forest system

Public issues were identified through citizen participation including public meetings, requests for comments, and personal contacts with individual members of the public, owners of adjacent private land, other agencies, local industry and conservation groups, and Indian tribes

During the early planning stages, over 30 possible issues were identified Some issues were beyond the jurisdiction of the Forest Service, resolved by existing laws, or best handled on a specific case-by-case basis These issues are not addressed in this document The remaining issues were then grouped based on common elements and similarities The five issues that remained became the key issues that guided the planning process

In reviewing the public comments, additional key issues were identified as having significant importance to the planning process In particular, road management is noted to have become of special concern to a great number of our publics Additional issues which are categorized under timber management and big-game management were also specified These additional issues, as well as other public concerns, were addressed between the issuance of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and this Final Environmental Impact Statement through analysis and alternative development These issues played a valuable role in the development and identification of Alternative I as the preferred alternative The summary of changes between Draft and Final for each chapter throughout this FEIS displays the effect these additional changes have had on alternative development These additional key issues can be found in the pages following, titled "Additional Issues Identified During the Public Comment "

In addition, the process used for identifying these issues is more fully discussed in the FEIS, Appendix A Also, the summarized issues and the Forest Service response can be found in the FEIS, Chapter V

K. How Are The Issues Used?

A central task in forest planning is analyzing the alternative ways of managing the National Forest The different emphases in goods, services, uses, and environmental conditions that people want (the basis of the issues) are used to help identify the alternative mixtures of management practices While one alternative may provide the best response to a single issue, another alternative may address several of them more effectively The difference between one response and that provided by some other alternative illustrates a tradeoff A comparison of the tradeoffs is necessary to determine overall public benefits and to determine the alternative which best responds to the issues while maximizing net public benefits

The issues that guided the Forest planning process are described below and on the following pages

ECONOMIC STABILITY: *How will management of forest resources affect* local communities?

The Malheur National Forest comprises about 39 percent of Grant County's acreage and 5 percent of Harney County's acreage, as well as small acreages in Baker and Malheur Counties Because of the substantial acreages, distinct economic ties, and the people's use patterns, the Forest's primary zone of influence has been determined to be Grant and northern Harney counties Industries and communities in adjacent counties are also affected by resource management policies on the Forest.

Malheur National Forest policies have a direct impact on local, dependent industries which, in turn, affect business income, wages, employment, and revenues to the counties The principal industries in the Forest's zone of influence are wood manufacturing, agriculture (i e , ranching), and retail trade These three industries account for about half of all employment in the area. Another large part of the economy is government employment, and much of that is also based on timber and livestock management

Forest management activities and the resulting outputs influence job opportunities, incomes, and the way of life of the approximately 15,000 residents in local communities It follows that changes in Forest outputs and activities will affect the social and economic life of the local population

Economic and community stability is acknowledged to be very important, and social stability is strongest when the local industries are healthy Many people (e g., mill employees, government officials, business owners) equate stability with a sustained supply of Malheur National Forest timber adequate to meet the demands of local industry. Some individuals or groups (e g , preservationists, conservationists, the Chambers of Commerce, retailers) also think that the counties have been too dependent on timber manufacturing, and that a more diversified economy should be cultivated, including growth in tourism Currently, most tourism occurs during the fall hunting season.

The Malheur National Forest also plays a role in county finances through payment of 25 percent of its revenues to the counties This money, of which 99 percent is from timber-generated receipts, has a significant effect on the finances of county schools and roads In 1989, Grant County received $8 7 million and Harney County received $2 3 million from Malheur National Forest receipts

Indicators of Response·
— Changes in jobs and income (first decade and long-term change)
— Payments to counties (first decade)

TIMBER MANAGEMENT: What level of sustained annual yield of timber products should the Forest provide while still maintaining forest productivity and meeting local, regional, and national needs? How much timber land should be managed for wood fiber production; what species should be favored; and what management methods should be used to achieve the desired harvest level and species mix?

The Forest has been providing timber products to the local and national markets for over 70 years The average annual total sale program quantity of timber sold over the last 10 years (1980-1989) has been 228 million board feet (MMBF) per year The Malheur National Forest 1979 Timber Resource Plan called for an average net sell volume of 230 MMBF per year over the same decade An analysis of the Forest's ability to produce timber indicated that the Forest could supply up to 59 2 MMCF (326 MMBF) per year on a nondeclining harvest schedule

This could have future implications for the local timber industry which is almost totally dependent on the Forest for its supply of raw material, especially in view of the Forest

and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA), and national and regional projections for rising demands and prices in future decades Local mills are maintaining a competitive market position currently by producing a quality ponderosa pine product.

The primary timber-producing species are ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, western larch, true firs, and lodgepole pine In the past, the majority of the volume sold has been from mature, open ponderosa pine stands (approximately 70 percent of the total volume sold); especially those found in fairly level, easily roaded areas Available areas for timber harvest are increasingly found in steeper areas forested predominantly with Douglas-fir, western larch, white fir, and grand fir. As timber stands are brought under management, trees of all species would be harvested at ages ranging from 50-150 years to maximize the utilization of the wood fiber production potential of the Forest Many trees are currently harvested at ages of 200 years and older

Management of the timber resource interacts with every other resource on the Forest The interrelationships are sometimes complementary, sometimes competitive, and sometimes mutually exclusive Rising demands for other resource uses are increasing the complexity of timber management. The desire for old-growth habitat–by groups such as Izaak Walton League, Audubon Society, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Natural Resources Council, and Grant County Conservationists to meet the needs of specific plants and/or animal species or for other reasons–would reduce the timber volume available to respond to national and regional demands and to maintain or expand the local wood products industry

The management methods which would provide the largest amount of wood fiber to meet national demands would provide this wood fiber primarily in smaller-diameter, mixed conifer species Although the local and sub-regional timber industry is anticipating and planning for this shift in product, some industry members express concerns because their mills are currently set up to process larger-diameter trees and they have a more favorable market position with ponderosa pine Local residents, hunters, and forest visitors desire the appearance of mature, ponderosa pine stands and express concerns about the appearance and success of clearcuts on the Forest County and state officials and private landowners emphasize the need for intensive management of the existing mixed conifer understory, particularly to reduce the losses related to spruce budworm and other insect damage

Competing demands for forest resources are exemplified by the demand for wilderness and roadless areas which preclude timber management This is described in a separate issue

Additional Timber Issues Identified During the Public Comment

The items below are those mentioned by a large portion of the public These issues were considered in the analysis and alternative development (Alternative I) done between the issuance of the Draft EIS and the preparation of the final documents The process for the development and use of planning issues can be found in the Final EIS (Appendix A, Section C) In addition, public comment summaries and Forest Service responses for each issue can be found in this Final EIS (Chapter V, Section C)

1. Uneven-aged management - The public expressed a dislike for even-aged management in general and clearcutting in particular They also expressed belief that uneven-aged management better protects all resources

2 Species mix - There was concern expressed about the shift in species mix over the next 80-100 years

3. Forest character - The public generally had support for the maintenance of the existing forest character, including an emphasis on ponderosa pine.

Indicators of Response.

— *Suitable timber land (thousands of acres)*
— Allowable sale quantity (1st and 5th decades)
— Suitable timber land under ponderosa pine management (thousand of acres)
— Percent ponderosa pine volume offered (1st and 5th decades)
— Acres clearcut (1st and 5th decades)
— Acres overstory removal (1st and 5th decades)
— Acres in uneven-aged management (1st and 5th decades)
— Size of average tree harvested (1st and 5th decades)

BIG-GAME HABITAT MANAGEMENT: What level of big-game habitat must be provided to meet the needs for desirable big-game herd levels?

Elk populations prior to 1970 were relatively stable but low During the past decade populations have steadily increased to a current summer population of about 6,600 elk, about one-third of these elk winter on the Forest Management of big-game herd levels is the responsibility of the State of Oregon, Department of Fish and Wildlife while the USDA Forest Service manages habitat occurring on the Forest. Ultimately the cooperation of both agencies will assure quality habitat that supports viable populations. Mule deer populations have fluctuated during the past 40 years and are currently on a downward trend in two of the seven game management units which include the Forest Management of big-game winter range for elk will provide for the wintering needs of mule deer as well since available mule deer winter range is minimal and overlaps with elk winter range Primarily mule deer winter ranges are on private lands below the Forest

Most of the winter ranges have adequate forage to carry both the present number of livestock and the present number of wintering elk Ranchers on private land adjacent to the Forest are concerned about the movement of elk off of the Forest to private land. The increased potential of the Forest to carry larger populations of elk will also increase the potential for more elk to winter on private land. The State management objective, for big-game populations for game management units which occur on the Malheur National Forest, is to supply winter habitat for approximately 2,800 elk

The wildlife issue of most concern to the public deals with elk habitat for elk hunting opportunities Most of the dispersed recreation use occurs during the deer and elk hunting seasons Most local, and many regional and statewide residents and hunter's groups, are concerned about forest management activities and their effect on elk numbers and hunting opportunities Most hunters are not only concerned about population numbers but are also concerned about the length of the hunting season, opportunities for success, and whether hunting will be on a limited entry basis that would reduce their hunting freedom

Big-game management and timber management are interrelated Habitat quality for big-game populations is determined by cover quality, size and spacing, and by forage and road density (disturbance) factors Timber management activities have improved, and can further improve, the balance and distribution of cover and forage Elk population numbers have increased, probably responding to available forage and controlled hunts

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODF&W) population objectives for the elk herds, hunter success rates, and the need to limit hunting opportunities in certain units are related to the anticipated effects of forest management of the habitat For example, in addition to total population objectives, ODF&W has objectives for bull-to-cow ratios for each herd at the end of the hunting season To ensure that not too many bulls get harvested, the Forest Service must limit access (by closing roads) or ODF&W must limit the number of hunters The Forest activity that most affects the management actions of ODF&W to meet its population objectives, is the control of access for hunters using motorized vehicles.

Additional Big-Game Issues Identified During the Public Comment

The items below are those mentioned by a large portion of the public These issues were considered in the analysis and alternative development (Alternative I) done between the issuance of the Draft EIS and the preparation of the final documents The process for the development and use of planning issues can be found in the Final EIS (Appendix A, Section C) In addition, public comment summaries and Forest Service responses for each issue can be found in this Final EIS (Chapter V, Section C)

1 Winter range There was concern about winter range management, timber yields from winter range, and winter range improvement practices

2 Minimum cover requirements· There was public concern that minimum cover requirements for summer and winter range may be too low and the definition of thermal cover may not be sufficient to identify actual quality of habitat

3 Road closure policy The public expressed concern over the lack of a specific road closure policy in both summer and winter range

4 Habitat modeling process There was concern about the habitat modeling process in general

5 Population goals There was a desire for population goals by winter range area

Indicators of Response

— Habitat Effectiveness Index (1st and 5th decades)
— Potential summer elk populations (1st and 5th decades)
— Potential winter elk populations (1st and 5th decades)
— Big-game cover quality (1st and 5th decades)
— Fish and Wildlife User Days (WFUDs) (1st and 5th decades)
— Acres in winter range enhancement
— Acres in winter range maintenance
— Miles of road remaining open (1st and 5th decades)

RIPARIAN AREAS: What effect will forest management activities have on riparian areas; what level of fisheries habitat productivity should be maintained; what level of timber harvest is compatible with riparian values; and what level of livestock grazing can be provided while managing for riparian dependent resources?

Although they occupy only four percent of the Forest's land base, riparian areas are the most productive and biologically diverse areas on the Forest These areas provide important fish and wildlife habitat and often contain very productive timber stands and productive, lush forage in grazing allotments Their gentle topography makes riparian areas attractive for road location and, in the semiarid west, the combination of water and riparian vegetation attracts recreationists Because of the variety and sometimes conflicting nature of these concentrated uses, riparian areas have the greatest potential for resource use conflicts on the Forest

National environmental groups (Izaak Walton League, Audubon Society, Sierra Club, etc) believe that overgrazing and unregulated livestock use of these areas result in a loss of streamside vegetation, increased water temperature, excessive bank erosion, and accelerated sedimentation of gravel fish-spawning areas These groups have raised riparian management concerns to a national level, often calling for elimination of grazing They urge that these areas receive special attention in land management planning This is reflected in the special mention of riparian area management in the NFMA regulations.

Locally, environmental groups, Indian tribes and the Columbia River Inter-tribal Fish Commission, and other agencies such as Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Environmental Protection Agency share these concerns to varying degrees

Riparian area forage production and livestock access to water are critical to the grazing allotments on the Forest and degraded riparian areas do not benefit the permittees On the other hand, local ranching operations would be adversely affected by significant reductions in permitted grazing levels The Grant County Resource Council and the Oregon Watershed Improvement Coalition also recognize the importance of healthy riparian areas and advocate coordinated uses of these areas which include grazing

Current inventories of Class I-IV streams on the Forest indicate 4,580 miles in all stream classes. The majority of these streams are in a condition which will meet the needs of the riparian dependent resources. However, approximately 235 stream miles have been inventoried as being in an undesirable condition Some of the characteristics of these streams are extensive areas of unstable eroding streambanks, lowering of the water table, and lack of adequate stream surface shading Although uncontrolled logging practices, roads adjacent to streams, insect outbreak, and fire can influence shading and streambank stability, the largest impacts on stream temperature and stability on the Malheur National Forest appear to be due to a reduction of hardwoods caused by ungulate grazing With few exceptions, the majority of the gullies on the Forest also result from the loss of the stabilizing root system caused by a reduction in the hardwood community

There is generally a consensus that improving streams and watersheds, which are in an undesirable condition, is beneficial for all resources and user groups The issue centers around the cause of the decline, the specific methods and treatments used for improving the health of the stream systems, and the rate of improvement. There are opportunities for increasing the rate of improvement in riparian zones; however, these would reduce the amount of forage available for livestock grazing and timber outputs

Indicators of response.

— Management strategies proposed for unsatisfactory riparian areas
— Animal-unit months of livestock grazing permitted
— Expected increases in anadromous fish production (pounds of fish)
— Smolt habitat capability index (1000s of steelhead smolts)

ROADLESS AREAS: Should some or all of the Forest's roadless areas remain roadless, be opened to roaded development, or be recommended to Congress for wilderness classification?

The Forest currently has 18 separate undeveloped areas comprising 180,948 acres Some people enjoy the recreation experience available in areas which have many characteristics of wilderness but fewer restrictions Such areas can be characterized as providing semiprimitive nonmotorized or motorized recreation opportunities Maintaining the undeveloped character would mean excluding such areas from regulated timber harvest and road construction. In areas providing for motorized use, off-road vehicle use may continue, mineral exploration and extraction could continue in both types of area

Areas maintained in an undeveloped condition would also be eligible for future wilderness consideration National and regional environmental groups such as the Wilderness Society, Native Plant Society, and Oregon Natural Resources Council are philosophically opposed to development of these areas, stating that in many cases there is no need for development and they should remain undeveloped rather than foreclose on future wilderness possibilities. (One of these areas, Pine Creek, was analyzed in this planning process for potential inclusion in the National Wilderness System as it was designated for further planning review by the RARE II Final Environmental Impact Statement.) These same

groups, as well as local environmental groups, some hunters, and some local residents favor roadless management of these areas because they believe it protects sensitive plant species, wildlife habitat, water quality, and other amenity values better than management geared toward consumptive uses

Others, such as the mining and timber industry associations and businesses, many local residents, and local governments, state that the management of these areas has been in limbo long enough. They want to develop access and the resources in these areas to end the uncertainty about their availability They state that the resources in these areas need to be managed so that they can contribute to local industrial and economic needs They believe that wildlife habitat can be improved and the vegetation will be in a more vigorous condition if the resources are managed for consumptive uses (primarily wood fiber production)

There are approximately 119,950 acres of tentatively suitable land in the RARE II areas. These same acres provide 92,408 acres of old growth Timber management activities could occur on 107,658 acres Of these available acres, 101,205 acres would be considered suitable for timber harvest and would provide a first decade annual allowable sale quantity of 28 MMBF (4 9 MMCF) and a long term sustained yield capacity of 5 74 MMCF/yr

Indicators of response

— Acres retained in an unroaded condition
(i e , semiprimitive motorized and nonmotorized management areas)
— Management of Pine Creek Further Planning Area

L. Additional Issues Identified During the Public Comment Period

Most of the issues identified during the public comment period were identical to or could be incorporated into the previously identified issues, as can be seen in in the previous paragraphs However, between the time that the preliminary issues were developed and the public comment period, road management became a key issue

ROAD MANAGEMENT: How can road management be used to make timber harvest, big-game habitat needs, and recreation opportunities more compatible?

Currently there are over 8,570 miles of Forest Service roads on the Forest Under Alternative F (the preferred alternative in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement), approximately 870 miles of roads would have been constructed and 1,360 miles of road would be reconstructed by timber purchasers during the first decade of the Forest Plan Of this total, 400 miles would be built in roadless areas that are assigned to timber production Public comments indicated that this was not desirable

The Malheur National Forest, in conjunction with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, has four cooperative travel management areas These seasonal road closures are designed to protect wildlife habitat, minimize harassment of wildlife, maintain adequate buck and bull escapement, and promote nonmotorized hunting During the hunting seasons, these management areas are under the "green dot system" enforced by the State Police and ODF&W Total National Forest land affected by these seasonal closures is approximately 172,000 acres

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the public have expressed concerns about the lack of a specific policy for the Forest as a whole and for some resources in particular General concerns include a belief that road densities are too high, that local roads should be closed and put back into resource production immediately following timber harvest, and that in many cases road construction and maintenance standards are too high

The greatest concern is the road management policy in relation with big-game habitat and hunting. Specifically, many expressed a desire to permanently or seasonally close roads to enhance big-game summer and winter range Included in this was a desire to increase elk habitat effectiveness, provide elk escapement areas, and provide for a nonmotorized hunting experience

These issues were considered in the analysis and alternative development (Alternative I) done between the issuance of the Draft EIS and the preparation of the final documents The process for developing and using planning issues can be found in this Final EIS (Appendix A, Section C) In addition, public comment summaries and Forest Service responses for each issue can be found in this Final EIS (Chapter V, Section C)

Indicators of Response

— Miles of timber purchaser road construction (1st and 5th decades)
— Miles of open road (1st and 5th decades)
— Total miles of system roads (1st and 5th decades)